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GHOST RIDER

JOHNNY BLAZE IS CURSED, DOOMED TO LIVE LIFE AS THE GHOST RIDER, A BRUTAL SPIRIT THAT EXISTS ONLY TO METE OUT VENGEANCE AGAINST EVILDOERS. AFTER YEARS SPENT BEING A PAWN OF HELL, BLAZE HAS RECENTLY LEARNED THAT THE GHOST RIDER IS ACTUALLY A WEAPON OF HEAVEN, BONDED TO HIM BY THE RENEGADE ANGEL ZADKIEL. AT LONG LAST, BLAZE KNOWS EXACTLY WHO'S RESPONSIBLE FOR RUINING HIS LIFE. BUT THE ONLY QUESTION IS, HOW DOES HE GET REVENGE ON AN ANGEL?

RECENTLY, BLAZE'S LONG-LOST BROTHER AND FORMER GHOST RIDER DANNY KETCH RE-APPEARED, NOW IN THE SERVICE OF ZADKIEL, WHO HOPES TO HARNESS THE POWER OF THE GHOST RIDER AND USE IT TO OVERTHROW HEAVEN. BLAZE AND A NUN NAMED SARA, GRANDDAUGHTER OF BLAZE'S FORMER ALLY CARETAKER, HAVE PURSUED KETCH TO THE MOUNTAINS OF TIBET.

GHOST RIDER (ISSN #1932-5258) **No. 28, December, 2008.** Published Monthly except semi-monthly in December by MARVEL PUBLISHING, INC., a subsidiary of MARVEL ENTERTAINMENT, INC. OFFICE OF PUBLICATION: 417 5th Avenue, New York, NY 10016. **PERIODICALS POSTAGE PAID AT NEW YORK, NY AND AT ADDITIONAL MAILING OFFICES.** © 2008 Marvel Characters, Inc. All rights reserved. All characters featured in this issue and the distinctive names and likenesses thereof, and all related indicia are trademarks of Marvel Characters, Inc. No similarity between any of the names, characters, persons, and/or institutions in this magazine with those of any living or dead person or institution is intended, and any such similarity which may exist is purely coincidental. $3.99 per copy in the U.S. and $4.50 in Canada (GST #R127032852) in the direct market and $4.99 per copy in the U.S. and $4.99 in Canada (GST #R127032852) through the newsstand. Canadian Agreement #40668537. **Printed in Canada.** Subscription rate (U.S. dollars) for 12 issues: U.S. $27.00; Canada $37.00; Foreign $39.00. **POSTMASTER: SEND ALL ADDRESS CHANGES TO GHOST RIDER, C/O MARVEL SUBSCRIPTION DEPT., P.O. BOX 110, NEWBURGH, NY 12550. TELEPHONE # (800) 217-9158. FAX # (845) 437-3829. subscriptions@marvelsubs.com.** ALAN FINE, CEO Marvel Toys & Publishing Divisions and CMO of Marvel Characters, Inc.; DAVID GABRIEL, SVP of Publishing Sales & Circulation; DAVID BOGART, SVP of Business Affairs & Talent Management; MICHAEL PASCIULLO, VP Merchandising & Communications; JIM O'KEEFE, VP of Operations & Logistics; DAN CARR, Executive Director of Publishing Technology; JUSTIN F. GABRIEL, Director of Editorial Operations; SUSAN CRESPI, Editorial Operations Manager; OMAR OTEKU, Production Manager. STAN LEE, Chairman Emeritus. For information regarding advertising in Marvel Comics or on Marvel.com, please contact MEL Dane, Advertising Director, at mdane@marvel.com. For Marvel subscription inquiries, please call 800-217-9158.

NGARI PREFECTURE.
TIBET.
WHERE ARE YOUR *WEAPONS?* SHOW ME WHERE THEY'RE HIDDEN OR I'LL RAZE THIS ENTIRE VILLAGE TO THE GROUND.
MY MOST HUMBLE APOLOGIES, HONORABLE GENERAL SIR, BUT THERE ARE NO WEAPONS HERE. THIS IS A *PEACEFUL* VILLAGE.
LIES!
TWO OF MY GARRISONS WERE FIREBOMBED LAST NIGHT AND I KNOW YOU TIBETAN TRASH ARE RESPONSIBLE!
AS I TOLD YOU, GOOD GENERAL, THAT WAS NOT US. THAT WAS THE *KHRAG 'THUNG*, THE BLOOD DRINKER.
AND AS I TOLD YOU, OLD MAN, I TIRE OF YOUR SUPERSTITIOUS RAMBLINGS.
SHOW ME THIS *KHRAG 'THUNG!* BRING HIM FORTH!
NOW!
DO NOT WORRY, MOST HONORABLE GENERAL...
HE IS COMING.

HUNG VAJRA PHAT.
STOP RIGHT WHERE YOU ARE! HANDS IN THE AIR!
WHO THE HELL ARE YOU?
I'M THE ONE YOU'RE LOOKING FOR.
THE GURU DRAGPO. THE WRATH OF THE FOUR HEAVENS. THE BLOOD DRINKER.
I'M THE ONE WHO KILLED YOUR MEN.

HAAHHAAA HAAAA!
IF YOU AND YOUR SOLDIERS FALL BACK NOW AND RETURN TO CHINA FOREVER, I WILL ALLOW YOU TO LEAVE THIS LAND INTACT.
CHOOSE TO STAY...
AND I WILL BURN YOUR SOULS TO ASH.
I TIRE OF THIS JOKE.
SHOOT HIM. SHOOT THEM ALL.

JASON AARON
WRITER

TAN ENG HUAT
ARTIST

JOSE VILLARRUBIA
COLOR ART

VC'S JOE CARAMAGNA
LETTERER

MARC SILVESTRI
COVER ARTIST

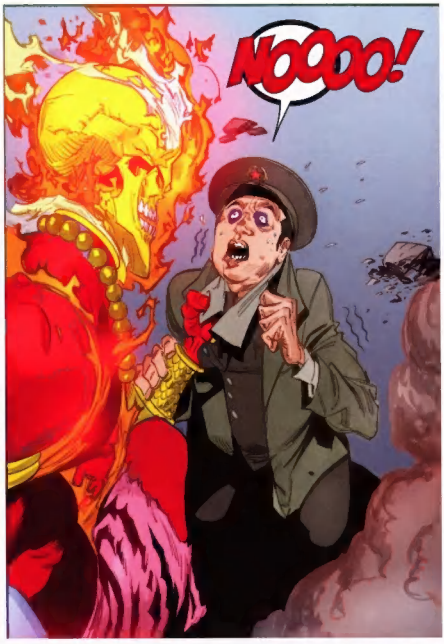
DANIEL KETCHUM & SEBASTIAN GIRNER
ASSISTANT EDITORS

AXEL ALONSO
EDITOR

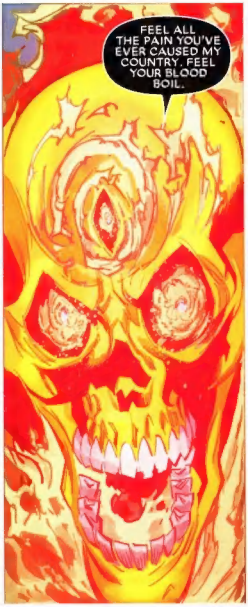
JOE QUESADA
EDITOR IN CHIEF

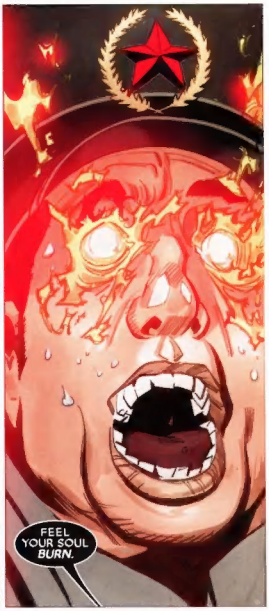
DAN BUCKLEY
PUBLISHER

NO! NO, STAY AWAY!


NOOOO!

TIME FOR YOUR PENANCE NOW, GENERAL. PREPARE, IF YOU CAN, FOR THE STARE OF THE THOUSAND BUDDHAS.


FEEL ALL THE PAIN YOU'VE EVER CAUSED MY COUNTRY. FEEL YOUR BLOOD BOIL.


FEEL YOUR SOUL BURN.

AAAARRRRRGGGHHHHH!!!

FUMP

MOTHER... WHO *IS* THAT?
THAT, MY DAUGHTER, IS THE *KHRAG 'THUNG*, HE WHO SEEKS VENGEANCE IN OUR NAME.

"THE ONE THEY CALL THE ***GHOST RIDER.***"

WHOA, EASE UP, OLD GIRL. WE'RE HOME NOW.
WE'RE SAFE.

MOMENTS LATER,
VVRROOOOOOMM!
THIS IS THE PLACE.

SARA...
CALL ME CARETAKER
SARA, THIS IS A WASTE OF TIME.

WE SHOULD BE BACK AT YOUR GRANDFATHER'S CABIN, TRYING TO SALVAGE WHATEVER'S LEFT. THOSE BOOKS OF HIS CONTAINED THE ENTIRE HISTORY OF THE GHOST RIDER.
I TOLD YOU, THOSE BOOKS DON'T MATTER ANYMORE. EVERYTHING THAT WAS IN THEM NOW RESIDES IN ME.

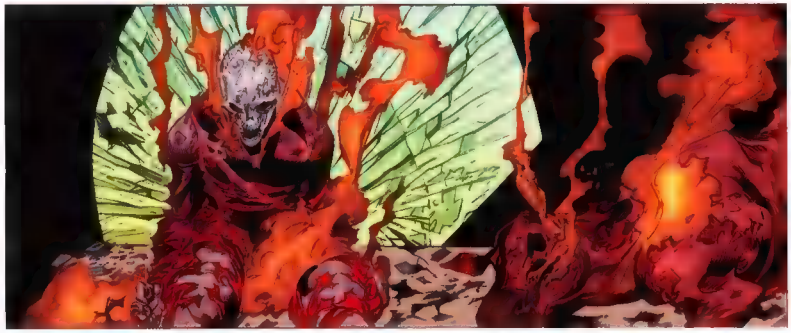
WELL NO OFFENSE OR NOTHING, BUT HOW DO I KNOW YOU'RE NOT JUST CRAZIER THAN HELL?

BECAUSE I KNOW EVERYTHING ABOUT YOU, JOHNNY BLAZE. I KNOW ABOUT YOUR PARENTS AND CRASH SIMPSON AND THE DEAL YOU MADE.
I KNOW HOW MUCH YOU LOVED ROXANNE. HOW MUCH YOU MISS YOUR KIDS.

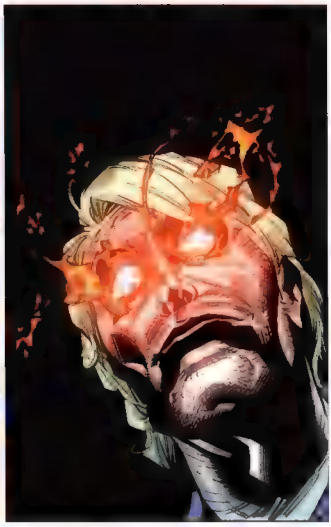
I KNOW ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU IN HELL AND WHAT YOU DID TO--
OKAY, STOP.

IF YOU'RE SO DAMN SMART, THEN JUST TELL ME HOW I GET TO ZADKIEL.
THAT'S WHY WE'RE HERE.

SMELLS LIKE WE'RE TOO LATE.



WHO WAS HE?
SEE WHAT?
YOU CAN'T SEE IT?
TRY LOOKING AT HIM WITH THE GHOST RIDER'S EYES.



HE WAS... HE WAS A *SPIRIT OF VENGEANCE*. JUST LIKE ME.
BUT I THOUGHT...
YOU THOUGHT *WHAT*, THAT YOU WERE THE ONLY ONE?

YOU'RE THE DIVINE WRATH OF GOD HIMSELF, JOHNNY BLAZE. YET YOU SPEND ALL YOUR TIME CRUISING AROUND THE U.S. OF A.
DID YOU REALLY THINK THAT WAS THE ONLY COUNTRY IN THE WORLD GOD CARED ABOUT?

THERE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN OTHER SPIRITS OF VENGEANCE. DIFFERENT ONES FOR DIFFERENT PARTS OF THE GLOBE, EACH TAILORED TO THAT AREA'S CUSTOMS AND RELIGIONS.
THIS ONE WAS MODELED AFTER SOME SORT OF WRATHFUL DEITY OF TIBETAN BUDDHISM.
NIMA.

THE MAN'S *NAME* WAS NIMA.

HOW MANY OTHERS ARE THERE?
THESE DAYS, NOT MANY. YOU CAN THANK YOUR BROTHER FOR THAT.

YOU'RE SAYING *DANNY* DID THIS?
NO. NO WAY. HE WOULD NEVER--

YOUR BROTHER IS NOT THE MAN YOU ONCE KNEW. HE'S A PARASITE NOW. ZADKIEL'S USING HIM TO LEECH THEIR POWERS.

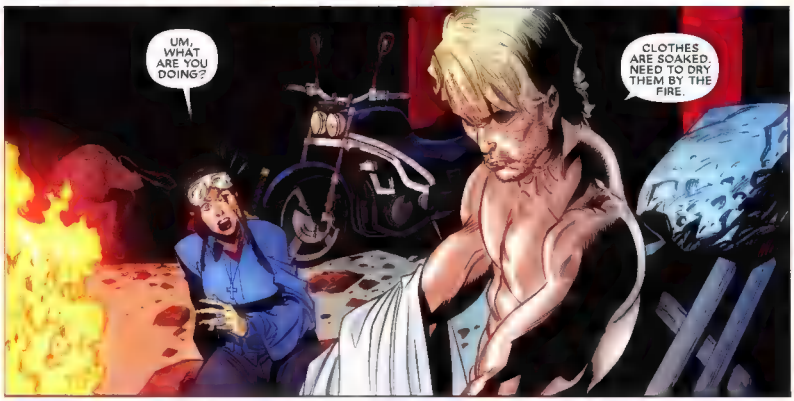
DANNY BLEEDS THEM DRY, LEAVES THEM EMPTY HUSKS, LIKE THIS.
ONCE HE'S FINISHED, ONCE THEY'RE ALL DRAINED, ZADKIEL WILL HAVE ALL THE POWER HE NEEDS. HE'LL BE UNSTOPPABLE.

I KNOW HE'S YOUR BROTHER, JOHNNY, AND I'M SORRY, BUT WHEN HE COMES FOR YOU, I PROMISE...

YOU'RE GONNA HAVE TO *KILL* HIM.

I WALKED ALL OVER THESE HILLS. NO SIGN OF DANNY.

HE'S STILL AROUND. I CAN FEEL IT.
YEAH.
SO CAN I.


UM, WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
CLOTHES ARE SOAKED. NEED TO DRY THEM BY THE FIRE.

WHAT? YOU NEVER SEEN A MAN WITHOUT HIS SHIRT BEFORE?
WELL... I...THAT IS...
NO, ACTUALLY.
WELL GROW UP, SISTER. YOU AIN'T IN THE NUNNERY NO MORE.
I'LL JUST... I'LL GO SLEEP IN THE OTHER ROOM.
SUIT YOURSELF.
BY THE LOOKS OF YOU PAL, I'D BET YOU LOVED BEING THE GHOST RIDER ABOUT AS MUCH AS I DO.

KEEP YOUR HANDS TO YOURSELF, BLAZE! I'M NOT THAT KIND OF GIRL!

DANNY?
YOU'RE NOT SUPPOSED TO BE HERE!
YOUR GRANDFATHER FAILED! YOUR BLOODLINE IS FI--
OOF
DANNY! MY GOD!
TALK TO ME, KID. TELL ME WHAT'S GOING ON HERE. I CAN HELP YOU. I CAN--
GET OFF ME, YOU IMBECILE!
DANNY! WAIT!

BLAZE, NO! DON'T GO AFTER HIM!
HE'S MY BROTHER!
DANNY!
WHUMP
DANNY, LET ME--
WHACK
KRUK

HOLD ON NOW! JUST SIMMER DOWN, KID.
THIS AIN'T YOU, DANNY. WHATEVER'S CAUSING THIS, I CAN FIX IT. JUST TELL ME--
OH YEAH, LIKE YOU ALWAYS FIXED EVERYTHING BEFORE, RIGHT? MY BIG BROTHER. MR. BIG SHOT.
YOU WERE NEVER THERE FOR ANYBODY WHO NEEDED YOU! YOU COULDN'T SAVE YOUR WIFE, YOUR KIDS, NOT EVEN YOUR OWN DAMN SOUL!
WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU, DANNY?
I'M SORRY. I NEVER SHOULD'VE LEFT YOU ALONE. BUT I THOUGHT I WAS DOING YOU A FAVOR, KEEPING YOU AS FAR AWAY FROM ME AND THIS CURSE AS POSSIBLE.
THAT'S WHERE YOU WERE WRONG, JOHNNY. IT'S NOT A CURSE. IT NEVER WAS.
IT'S A *GIFT!* A GIFT YOU DON'T DESERVE!
IS *THAT* WHAT THIS IS ABOUT? YOU WANT THE *GHOST RIDER* BACK?
JESUS, DANNY, YOU'RE *CRAZY.*
JUST GO HOME, OKAY? LET ME SORT THIS OUT.

I'M NOT GIVING YOU THE POWER BACK, ALL RIGHT! JUST FORGET IT! THIS IS MY BURDEN TO BEAR!
HEH.
YOU MISUNDERSTAND ME, JOHNNY.
I DON'T NEED YOUR GHOST RIDER.
FWWOOOOSH!!

I GOT MY OWN.
NEXT ISSUE:
GHOST RIDER
VS.
GHOST RIDER
ROUND 1
'NUFF SAID.

GHOST WRITERS

Before we get started, can I just go ahead and say that this arc, "Last Stand of the Spirits of Vengeance," is without a doubt the most fun I've ever had as a comic book writer? And man, we're just getting started.

Okay, first order of business before we get to your letters, I want to announce the winner of our most recent contest, where I challenged you readers to send in your cast list for the ultimate Flamehead film. A lot of you took up the challenge and sent in some great suggestions (Kurt Russell as Johnny Blaze, Daniel Day Lewis as Satan, Robert Downey, Jr. as Doctor Strange), but in the end, the blue ribbon goes to Sean D. Galloway of Lawrence, KS who provided this truly inspired list:

Steve McQueen as Johnny Blaze
James Dean as Danny Ketch
Ian McShane as Satan
Michelle Monaghan as Roxanne
Iggy Pop as the cannibal Wojciehowicz
John Goodman as Head Nurse

I think it was Goodman that pushed him over the top. Nice work, Sean. Once I get your address, expect a nice big package of signed GR comics to come winging your way. Now for anyone who's interested, here's my own off-beat GR cast:

Tim Roth as Johnny Blaze
Jason Patric as Danny Ketch
Robert Mitchum as Satan
Scarlett Johansson as Roxanne
Crispin Glover as the cannibal Wojciehowicz
John C. Reilly as Head Nurse

I don't know about anybody else, but THAT'S a movie I'd pay good money to watch. Now on to the letters.

Dear Ghost Rider crew,

I must say I am beginning to get more & more impressed by every single issue that you publish. I was a fan of the 90s Ghost Rider series, with Danny Ketch, but I was first introduced to Johnny Blaze in 1986 when I started to read the Dutch translations that were done of a few issues of the original run of the seventies, at age 12. Needless to say, in the beginning of the nineties I had devoted much of my time learning to read English well enough to get the original Marvel comics. In the years following I became a very avid comics fan, and this is one of the few times I feel obligated to respond to a particular series.

This new Ghost Rider has it all. It has the dark undertone I loved about another favourite series of mine from the 90s: HELLSTORM. But it doesn't go quite as far over the top, which should keep it just mainstream enough to appeal to a large(r) audience.

I find the art style impressive: Although it's not as straightforward as the styles I am a fan of, there is an atmosphere not unlike The Omen, The Exorcist and other classic horror movies, and that, my friends, just can't be an easy feat to pull of in a comic!

On another note: I am beginning to see that this series is a bit of a departure from what has gone on before: Zarathos from the first series, and the whole Spirit of Vengeance system from the second series are pretty much glossed over, and that is my only personal letdown: I am still one of those guys with continuity issues.

Still I trust you all with Ghost Rider. I am beginning to like this present incarnation as much as my favourite Ghost Rider series of the 90s.

If I might make a few suggestions for guest stars: Maybe you could use the occult demon hunter Gabriel (from HELLSTORM), in a future issue, or maybe even Hellstorm himself (I see him running around sporting a cape in THE LAST DEFENDERS, and I would like to see him here, more at home.) It would also be a nice touch to pry Devil-Slayer loose from AVENGERS: INITIATIVE, and maybe let one of my old time favourite demon hunters loose yet again.

Anyway, I just wanted to put my few cents in and comment on the poetic justice that can be found in a murderous religious fanatic being bludgeoned to death by a Holy Bible. These small touches make this Ghost Rider series one of my guilty pleasures!

As the old guard used to say:
Make Mine Marvel.

Erik Boere
Woerden
The Netherlands

Great suggestions for guest stars, Erik, and chances are you'll be seeing at least one of those guys (if not more) in the coming months. Stay tuned.

Hey Ghost Writers!

My name is Jim and I live in Morris County in New Jersey. I'm 15 years old, and I've been a Flamehead since the movie came out. I saw the movie and knew there was a comic series about Ghost Rider but didn't know if it was an ongoing. Coincidentally, a trip to my local shop brought me to Ghost Rider #1 (maybe it was my destiny?). Since then, I have gotten all the issues of the current ongoing, plus about 1/4 of the Ketch series, #1 of which I picked up at NYCC this year (among other great books) and own a few of the later issues with Vengeance and Caretaker. When you brought back Danny Ketch I was so excited that you were doing it that I ran in circles for nearly 10 minutes. THEN in #26 you brought back Caretaker (with his awesome Hellfire shotgun no less) AND Blackout. IT BLEW MY MIND! Everything was done perfectly, especially the last page where the nun runs into Johnny. I'm afraid to say it, but that is one of the most badass endings to a comic I have seen in a while (I also collect PUNISHER, the current ongoing PUNISHER: WAR JOURNAL, and WOLVERINE: ORIGINS) and it was excellently done. I cannot wait to see what Danny has in store for Johnny and Caretaker (we all know that he is alive, he can't die that easy!) and what Johnny and Caretaker have in store for Danny and Blackout. Keep up the awesome work, and until the local fire department extinguishes the hellfire from Ghost Rider's body, MAKE MINE MARVEL!

Jim
Morris County, NJ

Welcome to the fold, Jim. And while Caretaker may be dead now, you can bet that the hellfire shotgun will still be popping up again. And you'll never guess who'll be wielding it.

What is up, Ghost Rider Team?

My name is Robert Malmgren and I am a huge comic fan. I am a junior in high school and I have always wanted to write comics. I was wondering if you are going to bring back Vengeance. It's not a GR comic without him. I figure that if Michael Badilino is trapped in Hell, what if Zadkiel makes him a deal he can't refuse? Badilino gets his freedom back but now he has to work for Zadkiel. I don't know...it's just a thought ha ha. Who exactly is Zadkiel? I tried doing some research online and I even looked in the Bible. Is this guy just a fictional character?

One more question. When you are writing about GR and how he seeks vengeance against the sinners, are you trying to imply your own opinion on what the legal system should be like?

Robert Malmgren
Coal Center, PA

When I first took over GHOST RIDER, most everybody writing in wanted to know when Danny Ketch was coming back. And now that he's back, everybody wants to know when we're bringing back Vengeance. All I'll say is, keep your eyes peeled, Robert. Michael Badilino may very well be popping up sooner rather than later. But notice I said Michael Badilino, not Vengeance. Hmmmm. In answer to your other questions, no, I am certainly not using GHOST RIDER to try and make any sort of statement about our country's legal system. I'm just trying to write kick-ass stories. And no, we did not create the angel Zadkiel, though our version does bare little resemblance to what's supposed to be the "archangel of benevolence and mercy." Zadkiel's changed a lot over the years, I guess.

Dear Ghost Writers,

Wow! You guys never cease to amaze. Just when I think I can't POSSIBLY get more excited about this title, we've got TWO Ghost Riders running around, and ol' Danny brought back a bunch of friends.

I really thought the 90s series was quite excellent, despite the crotch rocket hellcycle and all the ninja stuff. It's so great to see guys like Danny, Caretaker, and Blackout again. Any chance of Jennifer Kale returning? (PLEASE keep Howard the Damn Duck away! I was rather unthrilled with seeing him mentioned in the newspaper clippings on the wall. Man, I just completed therapy from the first time he appeared in GR!) I am so very pleased there will be a mini featuring Danny, and I'm overjoyed with the news Javier Saltares will be working on it. With all due respect to all the others, Saltares and Mark Texiera are THE definitive flamehead artists. I can't wait.

Issue # 26 was excellent, as per usual. The Orb's Evel Knievel jumpsuit was a nice nod to the guy hugely responsible for the Ghost Rider trading in the horse for the Harley. I really like the way the Ketch storyline is slowly revealing itself. I may be in the minority here, but I'm a huge fan of long, epic story arcs. The chunks o' Satan story was like that and it was fantastic. This double Ghost Rider saga certainly has the potential to be even better. I'm very interested to see the role of Sister Sara in all of this.

In conclusion, I'd say your stated goal of making Ghost Rider the craziest and most exciting book out there has been met and exceeded. I keep telling everyone who will listen that this book can't possibly get any better, but you guys prove me wrong month after month. Please continue to do so!

Sincerely,
Mark Robinson
Colorado Springs, CO

Sorry you're not a big fan of Howard the Duck, Mark. No worries though, he won't be appearing in GR any time soon. I put that reference in GHOST RIDER #26 just as a way of paying tribute to the recently departed Steve Gerber, creator of Howard the Duck and one of my all-time favorite comic book writers. Mr. Gerber's work for Marvel in the 70s, on books like DEFENDERS and SON OF SATAN, has been a huge influence on my version of GHOST RIDER.

So do I really need to hype the next issue? You saw that cliffhanger, didn't you? All I'll say is... IT'S ON.

Jason Aaron
September 2008

"Keep your foot hard on the pedal, son, never mind them brakes."

GHOST RIDER VS GHOST RIDER

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